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Editorial

PHILOSOPHY AT THE CROSSROADS: BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN MEDIA, COMMUNICATION AND COGNITION

In an attempt to explain what mind is and how it works, the twentieth century philosophy turned to language. The linguistic turn in philosophy means relinquishing mentalist vocabulary in favour of explanations depicting thought in terms of linguistic activity. Rather than study pure thought, ideas or representations, philosophers elect to talk about language, the meaning of words and sentences, their syntax and points of reference. Since the early 20th century, researchers in various fields of humanities have highlighted the fact that language is neither a transparent vehicle for knowledge nor a neutral instrument of its generation. At the very root of the linguistic turn lies the general conviction that the medium of cognition and communication exerts significant influence on the cognitive process as such. It seems, however, that traditional philosophies of language, mind and science have failed to derive the ultimate consequence from this line of thought. Generally speaking, media as such, with the possible exception of language understood as a public system of representation, lie outside the scope of interest of philosophers of mind and philosophers of language. In particular, the cognitive value of writing and literacy remains highly underappreciated, despite the fact that most philosophical work actually takes place on paper. The failure to consider writing (and other media) as an important factor in the processes of cognition and communication seems to originate from an assumption, deeply rooted in philosophical tradition, that since any given thought may be expressed by means of any given vehicle (medium) the material vehicle of meaning does not impact the message it carries.

Classic philosophy tacitly assumes that the medium as such is a factor of no significance to the cognitive and cultural process. Research carried out under the theory of literacy (also known as the Toronto School) has been able to convincingly question this assumption. Detailed studies conducted by researchers such as Eric Havelock, Jack Goody, Walter Ong, David Olson, and pertaining to discrepancies in terms of the way in which oral and literate minds function,

provide plentiful material to challenge the commonsense belief that a written message simply constitutes an exact copy of a spoken utterance. Numerous analyses performed by literacy theorists corroborate the thesis that writing is not merely a convenient representation and transcription of a spoken message. While it facilitates certain forms of symbolic operations, the process of transcription can also hinder others, thus significantly altering not only the cognitive acts of the subject of communication, but also modifying the very tasks faced by actors engaged in it. The thesis constitutes an exemplification of a more general proposition that in the process of re-description of representation, what is changed is not merely the material vehicle of the message (the medium) but also its actual content and the nature of cognitive processes engaged in by the participants of communication. Intensive research is currently under way within the theory of literacy into the conceptual and cognitive consequences of media as such and the communicational practices correlated with the same.

This issue of *Dialogue & Universalism* aims to introduce the problems of media and communicational practices into the scope of philosophical deliberations, by demonstrating that the media of communication significantly influence the relations between language, its users and reality, which in consequence contributes to considerable cognitive and cultural changes. The underlying idea behind this collection of articles is the question of philosophy's response to the fact, diagnosed by the theory of literacy, of media mediating cognition.

Topics considered in this D&U issue are divided into three groups of problems. The first part includes papers whose authors aim to answer the question of how and in what sense can philosophical studies and the theory of literacy, or theories of communication, be mutually complementary. What can be gained by philosophy by reflecting on studies of the theory of literacy? Why would the theory of literacy or theories of media and communication benefit from philosophical reflection? The question of communication between representatives of different cultures and languages as well as the problems of understanding incommensurate historical and cultural contexts constitute the second area of interest in this issue. Finally, the third group of articles struggles with the issues of the pragmatic dimension of language and communication.

Publications contained in the D&U issue *Culture*, *Communication and Cognition* (CCC) approach the aforementioned problems from a number of theoretical perspectives. It was the intention of the editors of the issue to establish an interdisciplinary forum where the relations between cognition, communication and media in the cultural context could be discussed. Therefore, authors invited to contribute to the CCC issue represent various fields, from psychology, through anthropology, cultural and media studies, to philosophy itself. By entwining various threads of thought originating from areas where philosophical investigation meets the theory of literacy and theories of communication and media, this issue of D&U seeks to demonstrate how fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation can prove to be.

The editors of the CCC issue would like to extend particular thanks to David R. Olson for his participation in the conference "Culture Communication and Cognition: Explaining Cognitive-Cultural Components of Media and Communication" organised in Lublin in May 2012 and for his contribution and support. We would also like to thank Jan Sleutels for highly inspiring conversations. Both the conference in Lublin and this volume itself would certainly have been greatly diminished if not for the help of Grzegorz Godlewski, Zbysław Muszyński and Tomasz Komendziński.

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